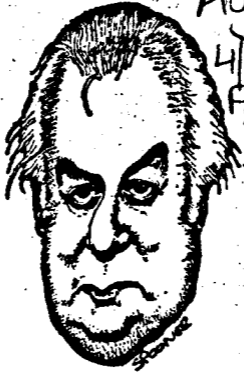


# Aid body attacks Whitlam's Timor visit

From IAN DAVIS



Mr Whitlam: guest of non-government body.

CANBERRA. — Australia's largest foreign aid agency has strongly attacked a secret visit to East Timor by the former Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam.

After a period of extremely restricted entry to Timor for outsiders, since the 1975 Indonesian invasion of the island, Mr Whitlam was secretly flown into East Timor by an Indonesian Government agency earlier this week.

Mr Whitlam is accompanied on the visit by the foreign editor of the 'Sydney Morning Herald', Mr Peter Hastings.

Mr Whitlam has been the centre of a fierce controversy over his role in the Indonesian invasion of Timor.

According to the former Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Mr Allan Renouf, Mr Whitlam told the Indonesian President, Mr Suharto at a meeting in Indonesia in September 1975, that it was "desirable" that East Timor be integrated with Indonesia.

The chairman of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, Mr Richard Alston, yesterday criticised Mr Whitlam's visit, saying: "To confine entry only to known Indonesian apologists and not independent observers would be a blatant double standard which can only lend further credence to persistent reports of continuing widespread famine and military repression in East Timor."

Mr Alston's attack is likely to strain further relations between Australia and Indonesia. The Australian Government has been trying to improve relations between the two countries over the past five years.

But criticism of Indonesian policies towards Timor by Australian organisations such as foreign aid agencies and Radio Australia — which the Indonesians say the Australian Government should silence — have thwarted the efforts of the Australian Government to patch up relations.

Although Mr Alston was speaking as the chairman of the aid council, he is also the Victorian president of the Liberal Party. The Indonesian authorities are unlikely to accept that he is not speaking in a semi-official capacity.

According to an official of the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra, Mr Whitlam is visiting East Timor in a private capacity.

During his visit Mr Whitlam is a guest of the Indonesian Centre for Strategic and International Studies which the Indonesian official said was a non-Government foundation. However, he acknowledged that the chairman of the centre is Mr Ah Murtopo, the Minister for Information.